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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002947

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL KWBG IS GAZA DISENGAGEMENT SETTLEMENTS

SUBJECT: SETTLER SPOKESMAN: WE WILL FIGHT DISENGAGEMENT TO THE END

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Eran Sternberg, Gush Katif Spokesman, told econoff on May 4 that, although some settlers are negotiating with the GOI on disengagement planning, the majority favor a continued struggle against the evacuation. He said the GOI is not ready with a solution for relocation, and the settlers must therefore fight or risk losing "respect." Sternberg described a three-pronged attack on disengagement comprised of settlers who will resist on the day of by refusing to be evacuated, supporters who will help them disturb electricity and water supplies, and security personnel who will refuse orders. He explained that whether settlers were willing to negotiate or not, most do not believe Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and they feel they will be forgotten in temporary caravans after disengagement rather than receiving the houses the GOI has talked about in the Nitzanim area. Sternberg denied that settlers are removing agricultural equipment from the greenhouses in the Gaza Strip because if disengagement falls through, the settlers will need this equipment in Gaza.

End summary.

Some Willing to Talk to GOI...

¶12. (C) Eran Sternberg, Gush Katif Spokesman, told economic officer on May 4 that some Gaza Strip settlers are negotiating with the GOI on disengagement and relocation because they want to "prepare an insurance policy." The settlers want to have somewhere to go once they are evacuated, he explained, and are participating in the dialogue to have a say in their fates.

...Others Fight to the End

¶13. (C) Sternberg reported, however, that the majority of the settlers remain in favor of continuing the struggle. He said for them there is no other option because the GOI will not be ready to relocate them in three months' time. Since they will be "refugees," they will fight the evacuation to at least "save their respect." Sternberg added that even some who are willing to talk to the GOI will still fight the disengagement plan.

¶14. (C) In response to econoff's question on how they plan to fight the evacuation, Sternberg described the struggle as a triangle. He said the first leg is the settlers themselves who will stay in their homes and resist the soldiers or police on evacuation day. The second leg consists of supporters who will go to the Gaza Strip to live with the settlers. According to Sternberg, some of the supporters are settlers from the West Bank, but also residents of cities in Israel such as Tel Aviv who support the settler movement. Sternberg continued that the two together, the settlers and their supporters, will increase the amount of acts of civil disobedience and will "paralyze the system without violence." As examples, he cited cutting off electricity and water supplies, and stopping trains. Sternberg said the final leg of the triangle is comprised of soldiers and police who will refuse orders to evacuate settlers. He did not provide any other details besides saying, "they're our brothers" and will help. Sternberg estimated that these tactics will have a 50-50 chance of stopping disengagement.

No One Trusts Sharon Regardless

¶15. (C) Sternberg explained that the settlers who do not want to negotiate with the GOI are refusing because they are disappointed with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, whom they are now calling "Crime Minister Sharon." According to Sternberg, the settlers feel that Sharon is conditioning the relocation solution to Nitzanim on them being "good kids," but the fact is that the GOI does not have a solution at all. He said this makes the settlers angry and they feel Sharon is "destroying people's lives" and is "not serious" about a relocation plan.

¶16. (C) Even for the settlers who are willing to negotiate with the GOI, they are only doing so to try to get the

government to fulfill its promise to the settlers and "not cheat us," according to Sternberg. He explained that these settlers are trying to delay the evacuation by six months or a year so that they will see houses in Nitzanim rather than temporary caravans. Sternberg continued that these settlers do not believe Sharon either and feel they will be forgotten after disengagement, so they want to see permanent homes on the ground and not just trailers.

17. (C) Sternberg said that regardless of whether settlers are willing to negotiate with the GOI on relocation planning or not, the general perception is that Sharon "means the contrary when he says something." He cited the example of Sharon's actions vis-a-vis Jonathan Pollard: Sharon allegedly was supposed to ask the President on the settlers' behalf for Pollard's release during his visit to Crawford Ranch, but Sternberg's sources in the U.S. told him Sharon never did. Sternberg also said Sharon "forgot a petition signed by 112 MKs" in support of Pollard's release. In response to econoff's question on whether the settlers would evacuate peacefully if Pollard were released, Sternberg responded that it would "not avoid the struggle, but it could reduce the flame some amount." Ultimately, he concluded, the Pollard incident proves to the settlers that Sharon cannot be trusted.

Equipment Still in Greenhouses

18. (C) With respect to settlement assets, Sternberg said he personally did not care whether the settlers' homes are destroyed or left intact for the Palestinians. On the greenhouses, he reported that he has not seen farmers moving their agricultural equipment to new greenhouses outside of the Gaza Strip because the settlers think there is a chance disengagement will fall through. If the settlers stay in Gaza, they will need the equipment in the greenhouses, he explained.

Comment

19. (C) It is difficult to determine how far the settlers are willing to go to fight the disengagement plan. Sternberg claims that even those who are negotiating with the GOI plan to disturb the process. Yonatan Bassey of the Disengagement Authority, however, recently told us that the settlers who are secretly talking to him will speak out against the evacuation for symbolic reasons but in the end will go without much of a fight. Regardless of what the settlers may or may not be currently planning, Defense and Finance Ministry contacts have told us the GOI is willing to up the ante financially to ensure the evacuation takes place as smoothly as possible. End comment.

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